

Harvard Allston Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, March 1st, 2006
Honan-Allston Library
7:00 p.m.

I. Attendance:

Harvard Allston Task Force

Paul Berkeley
John Cusack
Rita DiGesse
Michael Hanlon
Brighton Lew
Millie Hollum McLaughlin
Bruce Houghton
Harry Mattison
Ray Mellone

Boston Redevelopment Authority

Gerald Autler
Linda Kowalcky
Tom Miller

Harvard University

John Audi
Harris Band
Gary Hammer
Dan Rabinovitz
Kathy Spiegelman

II. Minutes

Gerald Autler called the meeting to order at approximately 7:05 p.m. and introduced Kathy Spiegelman, Harvard's Chief Planner for the Allston Development Group.

Kathy made reference to the recent press reports regarding Harvard President Larry Summers' resignation announcement, and stated that she wished to allay any concerns that President Summers' departure may mean a delay or rethinking of Harvard's Allston development plans. She said that the Harvard Corporation (the University's governing board) has stated that the Allston initiative remains on-track and that the University is still committed to moving forward with planning and development of its new campus in Allston.

Kathy went on to summarize the other recent press coverage regarding Harvard's selection of a site and architect for its first science building in Allston, and the University's designation of a

location for an interim Allston facility for the Harvard University Art Museums. She indicated that she would talk more about these projects a little later in the meeting, but first wanted to share some news with the Task Force about Harvard's negotiations regarding a possible land swap/new relocation site for the Charlesview Apartments.

Harvard has offered the Charlesview Board of Directors a portion of the University-owned property in the Brighton Mills Shopping Center--currently leased to K-Mart--as a possible site for the relocation of the Charlesview Apartments. As a meeting has been scheduled for Thursday night (March 2nd) with the abutters of the Brighton Mills property to discuss this proposal, Kathy wanted the members of the Task Force to be aware of the offer before it receives any further publicity.

Members of the Task Force raised several questions about the Brighton Mills site offer and the potential relocation of Charlesview: What is the process for Charlesview's decision-making? What will happen to the remaining commercial portions of Brighton Mills if Charlesview occupies the K-Mart site? What will be the density and height of the new Charlesview buildings? Are special zoning approvals and/or variances needed? Will the Task Force have a role in reviewing the proposed relocation and the new construction? Will Harvard play an active role in the development of the new Charlesview buildings? What if Charlesview accepts Harvard's site offer, but then is unable to secure the necessary zoning approvals? What are the tax-base implications of replacing a business such as K-Mart with the Charlesview housing? How soon is Charlesview expected to respond to Harvard's offer?

Kathy stated that it is too early in the process to have definitive answers to many of these questions, but that there would be further opportunity for questions and additional discussion with the Task Force on this topic if and when Charlesview responds positively to Harvard's offer.

Tom Miller said that the BRA had encouraged Harvard to bring the news of the Brighton Mills site offering to the Task Force tonight in the interest of early information-sharing, particularly since the Brighton Mills abutters meeting is scheduled for the following evening. He reiterated Kathy's point that it is too early to have answers to all the questions at this time, but that the process has to begin somewhere and that he looks forward to additional discussion with the Task Force over the coming months.

Kathy continued the presentation by showing a map highlighting the possible Charlesview relocation site, the proposed site of Harvard's first science building in Allston (south of Western Avenue and east of Barry's Corner, adjacent to the existing WGBH buildings), and the proposed interim art museum facility at the former Citizens Bank building, 1380 Soldiers Field Road.

She stated that Harvard has hired the architectural firm of Behnisch, Behnisch & Partner as the project architect for the proposed science building. Behnisch is a leading architectural firm in the development of sustainable or "green" buildings internationally, and was chosen in part due to the firm's understanding and respect for the design history/evolution of Harvard's campus.

Kathy indicated that the design process for the proposed science building has yet to begin and that there are no drawings or other visuals for the proposed facility to share at this time. She showed a photograph of the Genzyme World Headquarters building in Kendall Square as a local example of a recent Behnisch design, and indicated that this building is noteworthy as having one of the highest LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) sustainability ratings in the Boston area. She stressed, however, that the Kendall Square building should not be viewed as a model for what the Harvard facility will look like.

Harry Mattison asked how Harvard plans to bring the designs for the new science facility to the Task Force for review. What is the process and timeline?

Kathy replied that the first meeting with Behnisch will occur next week, and that design work is expected to begin in the spring. It is possible that Harvard would have some designs to share with the Task Force sometime this fall. Prior to that time, however, Harvard would like to arrange for the architects to attend a Task Force meeting to answer questions and better understand the community's perspectives and concerns.

Kathy continued the presentation by showing an aerial photograph of the former Citizens Bank building—the proposed interim location for the art museum. She referenced the information that was shared at the previous task force meeting by Tom Lentz, Director of the Harvard University Art Museums, with regard to the expected use of the building on an interim basis while a more permanent Allston location for the arts and culture programs is identified. The Barry's Corner area has been identified as the most likely long-term site for Harvard's arts and culture programs, and it is possible that Harvard will seek to establish additional near-term space for arts and culture somewhere in Barry's Corner. The former Verizon building at 224 Western Avenue was cited as a potential near-term location for such programs.

Two images were shown to help place the first science and interim arts proposals into the larger planning context for Harvard and North Allston. The first image was an illustrative campus framework plan from the Cooper Robertson & Partners Interim Report and depicted a conceptual vision of where Harvard's various types of uses might be located as part of the long-term campus development. The second image was a proposed land use map taken from the North Allston Strategic Framework for Planning (the neighborhood plan). Harvard's proposed science site falls within the "Mixed-Use East" area identified in the neighborhood plan as the focus for Harvard's future campus development. Kathy indicated that a more detailed presentation of the neighborhood plan is anticipated for the next meeting of the Task Force on March 13th.

Kathy ended the presentation with a series of slides describing the characteristics that make Harvard Yard a unique and appealing space, and why it is a space that is not easily replicable. She stated that part of the goal for the first science building in Allston is to keep these characteristics in mind in order to create a new but equally special place as part of the new campus.

A brief question-and-answer period followed the presentation. Ray asked Kathy when she thought the architects would be able to come to speak with the Task Force, as he would like to hear their initial thinking about design concepts for the proposed science site. Kathy responded

that the architects could meet with the Task Force before the design process gets underway, or could wait until there are some initial design concepts to react to. She said she would prefer the former approach of initiating the dialogue between the Task Force and the architect at an early stage. The Task Force agreed.

Kathy closed the meeting by encouraging the Task Force and all neighborhood residents to attend the Barry's Corner Public Realm workshop scheduled for Saturday, March 4th.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:40 p.m.